Grade Inflation of Secondary Schools



Are grades being inflated to increase the graduation rates? In 2015, the Department of Education boasted the United States’ highest graduation rate in U.S. history at 82.3% in 2013-2014. This is a significant gain in just 4 years since the uniform method for calculating the graduation rate was adopted by the states in 2010. The Department of Education attributed this significant increase to its investment of more than $1.5 billion into programs such as Race To the Top, Investing in Innovation, and School Improvement Grants (SIG). These programs are DOE strategies to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap (ed.gov). The goal by 2020 is to reach a 90% federal graduation rate. The DOE also reports a narrowing of the achievement gap from 17% in 2010-2011 to 14.8% in 2013-2014.

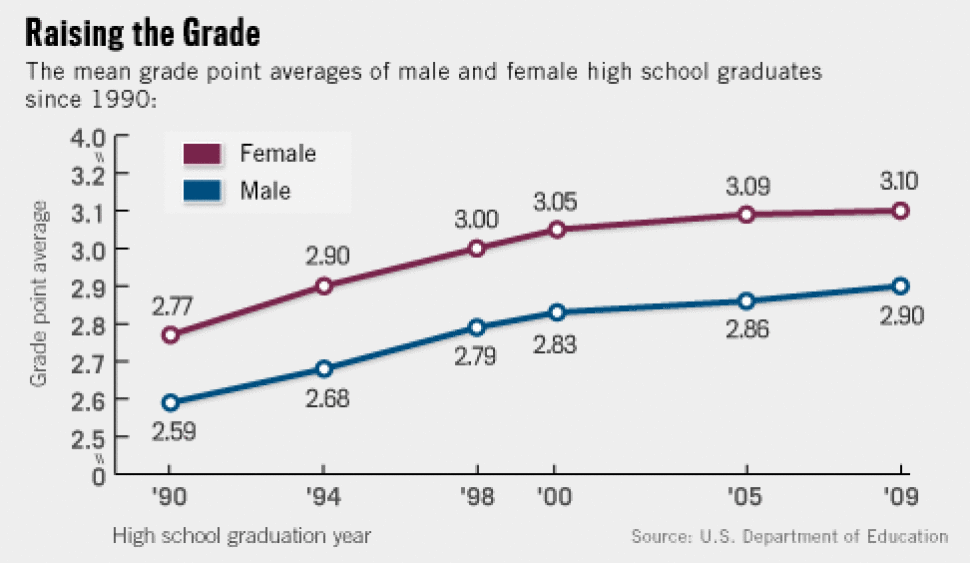
Too Good to Be True?

There are conflicting viewpoints as to the cause of the significant elevation in graduation rates. Some educational leaders believe that the new, common adjusted cohort graduation rate measurement, adopted by the states in 2010, promotes greater accountability among schools and encourages them to develop strategies to reduce the dropout rates which would inevitably increase graduation rates (ed.gov).

"When schools are held accountable and students are given support to help them stay in school and on track, real progress is possible," said John Gomperts, president and CEO of America's Promise Alliance.

Additionally, experts point to the decline in teen pregnancy rates and reduction in violent crime among teens as reasons for the increase in graduation rates. Districts have developed systems to target students with significant absences in order to better support students’ needs and decrease the dropout rate. Further, schools are expanding credit recovery programs so that students do not have to repeat grades (nytimes).

Opposing viewpoints hinge on the accusations that students’ grades are being inflated in order to boost the graduation rate. Inflating grades would allow more students to graduate and in turn, would help school meet their graduation requirements for federal grants. Data collected from 1990-2009 shows that the overall GPA of female high schools students increased by 0.33 points (from 2.71 to 3.1) and increased by 0.31 points (from 2.59 to 2.9) for high school males. Reports from the NHES in 2007 revealed that 81% of high school students received all A’s and B’s.



This data proposes the question of whether students are actually earning higher GPAs or if teachers, administrators, and school districts are inflating grades in order to meet the strenuous requirements of various federal and state grants that provide funding based on meeting graduation requirements.

“It is a pattern repeated in other school districts across the state and country — urban, suburban and rural — where the number of students earning high school diplomas has risen to historic peaks, yet measures of academic readiness for college or jobs are much lower. This has led educators to question the real value of a high school diploma and whether graduation requirements are too easy.” (Nytimes.)

Why do We Care Who Graduates anyway?

In today’s economy, it is imperative that students graduate from high school because of the decline of jobs that do not require a diploma. However, a high school diploma should not be the ultimate goal. Students should be prepared to navigate college coursework and work in high skilled jobs (nytimes). Schools and districts care about graduation rates because they are a dimension in which schools get evaluated upon when determining who receives grant money from the state and federal government. Schools and districts must meet target graduation rate requirements in order to receive the desired funding.

Trend or Issue?

The issue of graduation rates has been long standing because it is one of the most significant indicators of high school performance. In 2010, the states adopted a uniform, metric to calculate graduation rates using the four-year regulatory adjusted co-hort graduation rates. This nationwide system makes it easier to compare states and for the states to be held accountable for educational performance (ed.gove)

The problem with graduation rates is that it is unknown whether they are inflated in order to meet grant requirements. If rates are being inflated, whether educators are inflating grades in order to graduate seniors or state and local governments are reducing the requirements of graduations, students are paying the price and are not being appropriately prepared to succeed after graduation.

In 2014, 32 states did not require all graduates to take four years of English and Mathematics which is minimally required to be prepared for college. In some states, high school exit exams have been, eliminated because it was claimed that they made it difficult for students to graduate.

A focus school, Berea High School in Greenville, South Carolina, where the graduation rate has jumped from 65% to 85% in just four years, ACT results revealed that not one student scored high enough on the ACT to be deemed college ready in reading and mathematics.

Don’t Get it Twisted..

Raising the graduation rates nationally is a phenomenal accomplishment. The money spent in grants and programs to support schools in order raise graduation rates seems to be working. It is projected that by 2020 the graduation rate will reach 90% (ed.gove). The question remains, but at what cost? The most recent evaluation of 12th graders on a national test of reading and mathematics revealed that 40% of graduating seniors were NOT ready for college level work. As further evidence, college dropout and remediation rates remain high despite the graduation rates increasing with seniors supposedly college ready. College graduation rates should be soaring with the number of graduating seniors that have been rigorously prepared by our public school system and taught to a college and career ready standard. Sadly, this is not the case(nytimes).

<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Policies/Calculating-high-school-graduation-rates-At-a-glance->

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/27/us/as-graduation-rates-rise-experts-fear-standards-have-fallen.html?_r=0>

http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/states-report-new-high-school-graduation-rates-using-more-accurate-common-measur